

Ivory's Forest

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Summary: "There was one person I always looked up to the most back from where I hail. They taught me so much, and in part gave me the inspiration to become a hunter. I hate to imagine what she would think of me now." A story beginning around the start of the Battle of Beacon, centring on Jaune Arc.

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Jaune tapped his hands against his knees, absentmindedly drumming to the beat of a song. Other small sounds joined his light tapping. A few bullets slipping through shaky fingers and hitting the floor, the sharp gasps for air as someone did push ups in preparation and the soft humming of a certain Mistrali girl. He closed his eyes as the new, unfamiliar atmosphere washed over him. A hand absentmindedly made it's way to the back of his head, scratching lightly at his scalp.

The locker rooms were barely recognisable. Gone was the rowdy shouting, insults and jokes being made at the expense of other teams and the friendly camaraderie. Now, just seven fighters remained, all mentally preparing themselves for a really tough fight. Who was he kidding, if he was in their place he'd be freaking out.

Of course Pyrrha wasn't. Sitting there eyes closed, breathing in and out at long intervals. Everyone had their own rituals to attend to, but if he knew her then Pyrrha wasn't worried about the upcoming match; she'd done this a countless number of times before.

"Pyrrha?" At the sound of his voice her focus broke.

"Yes?" She still sounded hesitant. They hadn't really spoken much since that conversation. Knowing that will be one of her last good memories of him didn't sit well with Jaune. There had to be one last thing he could do to cheer her up.

The best thing to say didn't come to his head straight away. He chose

to instead sit and stare, eyes furrowed as he concentrated on sifting through words in his head.

Pyrrha looked down, spinning Mil³ between her fingers. It was a habit Jaune noticed she had picked up over time practicing with him, spinning her weapon when she couldn't think of what to say, not too unlike him.

"Are you okay?"

Great job Jaune, way to go. Out of all the countless of possibilities of things that you could say you choose: Are you okay? Perfect.

Pyrrha didn't raise her head "If by that you mean, am I ready for the fight? Then yes. I am okay."

That definitely wasn't what he meant. She may have been the Invincible Girl but Jaune swore she was just as socially awkward as Ruby. The similarities between the two red heads were actually far greater than most people knew, the benefits of being their close friends he supposed.

I'm not even going to see Ruby....

This was frustrating. Pyrrha wasn't listening. Jaune was certain about this because he could see all the same damn mannerisms he himself did when questioned like this. It was sad, if anything.

"No. I mean, are you okay in general? You've barely been yourself the past day. You're worrying everyone. Including me. Especially me."

She looked up at this, before lowering her gaze again, a slight blush gracing her, "Jaune it's fine, I'm just worried about the fight. There's nothing wrong, believe me."

"Pyrrha please, stop. Just be quiet for a moment."

Pyrrha flinched back at his harsh tone. It hurt to see her react like this, perturbed by the unfamiliar voice. Still, it was hard to control himself when his frustration was rising, but he continued.

Taking a moment to rub his brow and calm down, he lowered himself on to the bench. His outburst had been louder than he thought and drawn the attention of some of the other students. Briefly meeting his eyes with Sun's, the faunus nodded to him reassuringly, before turning away. It felt good to know that even someone he was only really acquaintances with was concerned for someone like him.

Looking back to Pyrrha broke his heart. She seemed so small and that wasn't the girl Jaune knew. Pyrrha for the most part had been his rock, it was only on rare occasions where he'd find himself being the support. She deserved to know.

"I just want to say some things to you. I know, without you saying, that whatever I said to you yesterday caused you to hurt and I'm sorry. I want to get that across. I'm sorry. Sorry for a lot of things which you'll say I shouldn't be sorry for. Like you having to

carry me, train me, look after me and more. Sorry for what I said yesterday and sorry for things I may do in the future."

"Jaune I-"

"Shh Pyrrha, let me talk for now. Just listen for a few moments more. You proved to me that a stranger could become the closest person to me."

Jaune noticed her relent and look up at him, allowing him to speak. Taking a breath, and never breaking his gaze from that beautiful face, he found the courage to say more than he had ever been able to say in his life. Courage Jaune didn't have until after he met her. After she warmed his cold, lost soul.

And soon you'll be rueing those words, making it more imperative to say them all now.

"Pyrrha. You're going out there to fight and it pains me that I won't be able to be by your side. But I know you can do it. You have qualities I dream to possess. And I believe in you, like Nora and Ren also believe in you, and how for some dumb reason the three of you believe in me as your leader."

Staring deep into Pyrrha's eyes, Jaune grasped her hands tighter. Her face was unreadable, full of varying emotions. One was the clearest however.

Her eyes pleaded at him to speak.

"Pyrrha. I love you. Remember these words for as long as you can. Please... try to remember them," It's painful to get the words out, choking on the words as he felt a few tears fall down his face and onto his hands, "Remember that I love you and would never do anything to hurt you."

Pyrrha sat frozen, eyes shimmering with wetness. They were close, the closest they had been in every sense of the word.

"Pyrrha-"

In an instant she had brought her face onto his, hurriedly pressing her lips into Jaune's. Returning the kiss, he pushed harder against her, bringing his arm around to rest on her nape, holding her tight.

"Jaune I-", she cut off their kiss to speak, but he put his thumb up to her mouth to silence her "I know. Go out there and make team JNPR proud," struggling through the tears to get the words out, he forged on. He knew it would hurt to stay there much longer.

It hurts exactly the right amount. It's what I deserve.

"Go out there and win and be happy and do everything that you possibly can. Just remember that I will always love you."

Leaning forwards he captured her mouth once more, only then to cling to her, pouring as much warmth and love he could into the Invincible Girl. It felt as if their Auras were intertwining, becoming one. But it was just the intense feeling, nothing more.

"I'll be cheering for you, always. If you get nervous I'll be in the crowd. Good luck." Jaune's tongue turned black.

Jaune exited the locker rooms just as the announcement came for the fighters to exit to the stage. Leaving his heart behind, he turned to take one last look at her.

A multitude of emotions surged through Jaune. It was almost impossible how much he was feeling, like he needed to physically sit and heave them out.

It felt terrible to lie to the person closest to him. And that was exactly what he had. He lied to her. And he was all the more terrible for it. Even the truths he could say were still going to be worthless soon enough. He doubted she would remember those parts.

Jaune never knew he could hate himself this much.

He attempted to switch his mind to focus on walking and not stopping until he got to the docks of the Amity colosseum.

I should be in the stands cheering my soulmate on.

The airship arrived on time. Before entering he turned and took one last longing look.

This was the moment of decision, he could go back to the stands and be on the right side, fighting along with his friends. It had been so tempting to tell everyone what was going to happen. About the Grimm. About Cinder. It's what anyone with a spine would have done.

Fighting beside Ren, playing with Nora, having a heart-to-heart with Ruby, teasing Weiss, discussing a good book with Blake, laughing at a dumb pun Yang made. And just being in the presence of Pyrrha. Those were the moments Jaune lived for now.

He wanted to scream.

But when it came down to it, it wasn't his decision. He didn't have a choice really. Just doing what was asked of him.

At least I made those videos. Though they won't help much. It may give Pyrrha some respite eventually.

"Tsk." He almost laughed as he thought of the complete, angsty image he now had, not too dissimilar to Adam.

Although I would never say that to his face.

The click of heels signaled the approach of his new teammate.

The young Arc pulled the mask out of his bag and turned it over to look down at his recent acquisition. He sighed one final time.

A grimm-bone mask with four horizontal strips for eyeholes stared back at him. Four bloody arcs were painted in, hopefully, red paint, disturbing the white-bone. His new face.

He had been told it looked similar to Adam's, and he had to agree up to a point. The fact that it was his made it more terrifying. There was something about what it now represented which deeply unsettled Jaune. Definitely a far-cry from a blue onesie.

A choked laugh came out at the irony of the situation. Fitting really. Bloodying the family name in words and actions.

"Let's get going, Neo."

With a twinkle in her colour-changing eyes, she saluted and smiled at him before boarding their vessel. Jaune found it wholly unnerving how attached to him she was.

I wish she wasn't. Ice-creamed psychopath.

Following behind he stood staring out of the side of the ship as it took off, holding on to the side as they flew towards Ironwood's battleship. He had entirely given up trying to change his expression from a permanent grimace to anything else.

Looking back on the Amity Colosseum and Beacon one final time as the green, hopeful Jaune Arc, the wannabe hero, he put on the mask and prepared for what was to come.

* * *

><p>Hey there, I wrote this introduction for a story I'm thinking of writing, so if you're interested then posting a review would be lovely. I've read a lot of stories on here and thought it's time for me to throw my hat onto the pile. The story will have only slight AU elements, just changing certain events that happened in the past but I don't want to say too much right now.

And I have to give a big thanks to TheLastSonata who has helped me out massively with editing this beginning. He's given me lots of pointers of how I can write better and given me confidence in writing something to follow up this short, proof of concept. Hopefully I'll speak to you soon!

End
file.